Indexed 5/8/17

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS
ON APRIL 20, 1917. 451

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The fourth meeting of the Commission of Fine Arts in the fiscal year of 1917 was held in their office, 1729 New York Avenue, Northwest, Washington, D. C., on Friday, April 20, 1917.

The following members were present:

Charles Moore, the Chairman;

Frederick Law Olmsted;

Thomas Hastings;

Herbert Adams;

J. Alden Weir;

Charles A. Platt;

Wm. Mitchell Kendall;

also Colonel Wm. W. Harts, U. S. A., their Secretary and Executive Officer.

The Commission was called to order at 9:15 a.m., and immediately proceeded to business before it.

1. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING: The minutes of the preceding meeting, held January 12, 1917, and of the committee meeting on March 7, 1917, in New York City, were presented by the Secretary, accepted, and approved.

2. MODEL FOR KEY MEMORIAL: Mr. Adams reported that, with Mr. Platt, he had at the request of the Secretary of War inspected the quarter-sized model for the Francis Scott Key memorial at the studio of the sculptor, Mr. Niehaus, at 1947 Broadway. He stated that they had made several suggestions regarding desirable minor changes in the bas-relief, &c, and that Mr. Niehaus had agreed to make them. Upon Mr. Adams' recommendation, this model was approved.

3. FIELD HOUSE FOR EAST POTOMAC PARK: Colonel Harts laid before the Commission preliminary plans and designs for the new field house in Potomac Park. (See exhibit A for list of drawings). This is the first structure to be erected under the approved plan for the development of the park as a public playground, the limit of cost of the house being fixed at $200,000. The most important suggestions made were to omit the assembly hall shown and put in its place and in place of the loggias each side of it an open court surrounded by porches, - that porches be placed on the northwest and southeast ends of the group, - that the porches shown be made wider (at least 20 feet), with round columns and beam ends projecting beyond the eaves to carry vines, - and that the kitchen shown be made smaller and put above ground, since its functions would not be extensive.

4. LAYOUT FOR BATHING BEACH: Colonel Harts placed before the Commission the approved design for the new bath house (P. B. & G. file No. 2,497.2) to be located on the Tidal Basin, with the request that he be advised as to the best location. The site that had been tentatively decided upon by him was on the point projecting into the Basin on its south side between the Inlet and Outlet tidal gates; the members felt that if placed on this point the building should be located in concave form instead of straight across the point so that the shore line might be followed more closely. It was thought, however, that a better location for the house would be within the line of the curve between this point and the Inlet bridge, and Mr. Olmsted later in the day inspected this site with the architect of the building. Alternative plans for the location of the building on each site will be submitted at the next meeting.

5. TREATMENT OF GEORGETOWN RESERVOIR SITE: Colonel Harts laid before the Commission a plan for the treatment of the old Georgetown Reservoir, which is now United States park property. (P. B. & G. plan No. 325.11). After an inspection of the ground later in the day, the Commission approved of the circulation shown, with sug-

gestions that instead of formal treatments for the playground section at the extreme southern end and for the central portion on the middle terrace, a simple turf treatment be substituted. A further suggestion was made that at the southern end of the retaining wall bounding the property for a part of the way on the west, an entrance treatment be studied out. The suggestions are being followed out in revised plans.

6. TREATMENT OF MERIDIAN HILL PARK: A plan for the treatment of Meridian Hill recently prepared by the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds was next considered (P. B. & G. No. 327.5c). The Commission approved the general rearrangement of the upper area with the two long walks of approach at the center of the big terrace; also the development of the cross-axis from the north axis of 16th Street to the treatment opposite Chapin Street; also the carrying of the tree planting to enclose the end of the major terrace. A plain turf panel between the two long walks was preferred to a formal parterre. It was also suggested that the parking space at the upper end be moved south on Euclid Street considerably with the curb line left in the present position except in the center where it could be broken down to allow parking between the trees; that the corner entrances be eliminated and that the entrances be taken at right angles to 15th and 16th Streets; that the central panel be kept open with a grill insert and that the ends of the long walks be closed with a terminal motive; and that the masonry treatment be carried around Euclid Street to connect with the central grill. In the concert area the general location of the concert pavilion was approved, but the areas to the sides should be made into formal groves. The entrances at the end of the west sidewalk of 15th Street opposite Belmont Street were satisfactory, and also treatment showing the cross-axis of the lower garden at right angles to the main axis of the park. Preference was expressed for a direct entrance into the main garden from 16th Street. It was further advised that the entire lower garden be moved north to permit of adequate planting back of it and inclusion of existing trees in the background area. Simplification of the mosaic treatment of the lower garden on the architect's study for the Buchanan memorial was

recommended, as well as restudy of the small grass and tree areas in that section.

7. SITE FOR ERICSSON MEMORIAL: At the last meeting held in New York City (see pages 1 and 2 of the minutes of the meeting on March 8, 1917), the problem of deciding upon a site for the Ericsson Memorial had been before the Commission. The Swedish Advisory Committee, who had looked over the available sites in Washington, had asked for a site on the north and south axis of the State, War, and Navy Department Building, and immediately east of the Pan-American Union Building, though bearing no axial relation to the latter. At that time they were promised that the Commission would give them that site if it was found suitable, or a better one. The Commission, later in the day, inspected the site and considered it inappropriate. As a substitute they offered a location between the Lincoln Memorial and the Potomac River on the axis of South B Street, provided that the memorial shall be in the main architectural in character rather than sculptural, and that it be considered in relation to the Lincoln Memorial. This site had also been favorably considered by the Swedish Advisory Committee when they inspected available locations in the city. (See Exhibit A).

8. TREATMENT OF CHIMNEY FOR "MERIDIAN MANSIONS APARTMENT HOUSE": At a preceding meeting the question as to what height the smokestack on the power plant of the new Meridian Mansions Apartment House should be erected had been laid before the Commission by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia, and a definite recommendation made by the Commission. The District Commissioner now submitted a preliminary sketch for that smokestack with request for opinion as to whether it meets the conditions of a satisfactory design for such a structure in that neighborhood, and added that the builders were prepared to modify the design of the chimney and the powerhouse itself. The Commission advised a less ornate treatment of the chimney than was shown in the sketch submitted, with a consistent termination of the stack with cone-shaped top of open-work iron. To give a clear idea of their meaning, a rough pencil sketch was transmitted for the information of the District Commissioners. (See Exhibit B).

9. QUESTIONS ARISING IN CONNECTION WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW WASHINGTON HOTEL: The Commissioners of the District of Columbia had referred several questions arising in connection with the erection of the new Washington Hotel at the corner of 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue to the Commission for advice. In view of the many points to be considered in acting on their request it is best to quote the body of their letter here in full, as follows:

"The Commissioners of the District of Columbia have before them for approval the plans of the Hotel Washington, to be erected on the east side of 15th Street, Northwest, between Pennsylvania Avenue and F Street. The Act to regulate the height of buildings in the District of Columbia, approved June 1, 1910, provides as follows:

> 'On blocks immediately adjacent to public buildings or to the side of any public building for which plans have been prepared and money appropriated at the time of the application for the permit to construct said building, the maximum height shall be regulated by a schedule adopted by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia.' (D. C. Building Regulations, page 78)

"Pursuant to this authority, and in connection with buildings erected on the east side of 15th Street North of F Street, the Commissioners adopted and promulgated a schedule which reads as follows:

> 'On 15th Street N.W., between Pennsylvania Avenue and G Street, adjacent to the Treasury Building, the cornice line or parapet wall of any building shall not extend above a horizontal line eighty feet above the top of the curb at the southeast corner of 15th and G Streets N.W., and no part of the roof of any building shall be higher than a horizontal line 95 feet above the top of said curb, excepting ventilation and elevator shafts, which shall be set back from the side lines of the building a distance equal to the height of such shafts above the adjacent roof.'
> (D. C. Building Regulations, page 80)

"The Board of Commissioners does not feel that it has any authority to exercise control over the architectural detail, but that its duties are limited to seeing that the law and regulations are fully complied with.

"Two questions have arisen in connection with the plans of this building, and they are illustrated by the two blue-prints which accompany this letter.

"The first point relates to the suggested vertical parapet wall, 10 or 11 feet high, that extends above the cornice line, which latter is placed at the maximum vertical height elevation permitted by the regulation. It will be noted that the regulation provides that the cornice line or parapet wall shall not extend above a horizontal line "eighty feet above the top of the curb," etc. In the Riggs Building and in the Metropolitan Bank Building this requirement was met by the construction of a mansard roof. In the plans for the

Washington Hotel a vertical parapet wall is proposed, but set back so as to be within the lines of a mansard roof. The Commissioners would be glad to be advised whether, in the judgment of the Fine Arts Commission, this slight departure from the letter of the regulation is objectionable.

"The second question pertains to the structural features that extend above the roof line, which is placed at the maximum permissible elevation of 95 feet above the top of the curb. The plans herewith show on the 15th Street front a pergola effect, with substantial wooden posts and more or less ornamental rail. Since these plans were received, however, the Commissioners have been advised that this feature will be changed and for the wooden posts light iron pipe will be substituted, making a construction almost identical with that in existence on the top of the Riggs Building. In rear of the proposed pergola it is intended to construct three structures, one on the F Street front, one on the Pennsylvania Avenue front, and one on the intermediate wing. These structures have a maximum height of about 17 feet and in themselves are considered to be quite ornamental. The question at issue is whether the fact that their westerly fronts are set back only 35 feet from the 15th Street building line is not a violation of the spirit, at least, of the law.

"In this connection it should be borne in mind that, exclusive of the special legislation and regulation above quoted, the permissible heights on F Street and on Pennsylvania Avenue are considerably in excess of those proposed for the super-imposed structures.

"The real question is whether a set-back of 35 feet from the 15th Street front for the super-imposed structures is sufficient to prevent overshadowing of the Treasury Building, which is assumed to be the intent of the law.

Mr. Hastings, as a member of the firm of architects of the building, explained the situation. The Commission then decided, as to the first point decided about, that the plans show that the additional story occupies a space well within the permissible height of a mansard roof, and for appearance sake is much to be preferred to a mansard. As for the pergola-like structure, they found that it is calculated to add to the appearance of the sky line of the building, and that the height to which the building has been carried, including pergola, is much less than the permissible height on Pennsylvania Avenue and F Street; on the whole, the purpose of the regulations for the protection of the Government building has been fully met in the plans submitted, and their approval by the District Commissioners was recommended. (See Exhibit C).

10. MONTROSE PARK: Colonel Harts then submitted a plan for the treatment of Montrose Park (blueprint in files). After an inspection of the ground later in the

day, it was felt that the whole park should be redesigned, the new design to be gradually effected. The most important suggestions made as to details were that the long rope walk with bordering osage orange hedge be eventually removed, and the heavier treatment which now borders that path be relocated across the front of the park, - that the small box hedge bordering the pathway at the left of the path be eliminated since it now had lost its purpose, and that a hedge be placed across the front of the park.

11. BOTANIC GARDEN REPORT: The Chairman next read his preliminary draft of the Commission's proposed report on the removal and relocation of the Botanic Garden, which had been requested by the House Committee on the Library. The draft was discussed, a number of suggestions for elaboration being made which are being considered in the further study of the report. Further action was held over until the next meeting.

12. MISCELLANEOUS: The Commission then adjourned for lunch, having as their guests, Lieut. Colonel Spencer Cosby and Major U. S. Grant, 3d, respectively former Secretary and Acting Secretary of the Commission, Mr. Cass Gilbert, and Mr. Paul Bartlett. After lunch the Commission made an inspection of Mount Hamilton which has been suggested as a desirable site for the Botanic Garden, thence past Meridian Hill to Montrose Park, and the Georgetown Reservoir; from there to a point on the crossing of the axes of New Hampshire Avenue and E Street, and at the point between the Potomac River and the Lincoln Memorial formed by the crossing of South B Street and the Potomac Parkway, each of which had been suggested as possible sites for the proposed Ericsson Memorial.

There being no more business to come before the meeting, the Commission adjourned, subject to the call of the Chairman.

Approved: Charles Moore
Chairman.

Colonel, U. S. Army,
Secretary and Executive Officer.

Plans of East Potomac Park Field House

before Commission of Fine Arts, April 20, 1917.

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|---|---|---|---|
| Plan of Field House, | 1/8 scale | 333.34 | |
| Block Plans, House and Grounds, porches, etc., | 1/40 scale | 333.35 | A & B |
| Field Elevation, | 1/8 scale | 333.36 | A & B |
| Water " | 1/8 scale | 333.37 | A & B |
| Side " | 1/8 scale | 333.38 | |
| Sections | 1/8 scale | 333.39 | A,B,C,D. |

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April 24, 1917.

Dear Sir:

The Commission of Fine Arts, after inspecting the site proposed by you for the location of the Peirsson memorial opposite the Pan- American building at the northeast corner of Seventeenth and B streets, northwest, considers that position site inappropriate. The Commission favor a site between the Lincoln Memorial and the Potomac River (indicated by a cross on the attached plan), provided that the memorial shall be, in the main, architectural in character rather than sculptural. It is essential that any structure erected in relation to the Lincoln Memorial shall be considered with that building.

Very truly, yours,

(signed) Wm. H. Bertle

Colonel, U. S. Army,

Secretary and Executive Officer.

C. G. Bergquist, Esq.,
Secretary, Advisory Committee
on the Princess Memorial,
Brunswick-Blue Mesa, N. Y.

COPY

April 26, 1917.

Dear Sirs:

With reference to the design for the proposed chimney for the apartment house to be constructed at 16th and Crescent streets, northwest, regarding which you requested an opinion from the Commission of Fine Arts in your letter of April 19th last, the Commission suggest a less ornate treatment of the chimney than is shown in the elevation submitted, and a consistent termination of the stack with cone-shaped top of open-work iron. The pencil sketch herewith transmitted will give an idea of the meaning of the Commission.

By direction of the Commission:

Respectfully,

(Signed) Wm. W. Harts

Colonel, U. S. Army,

Secretary and Executive Officer.

The Board of Commissioners
of the District of Columbia.

ABC

Enclosures.

COPY

April 26, 1917.

Dear Sirs:

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By direction of the Commission:

Respectfully,

(Signed) Mr. W. Hartz

Colonel, U. S. Army,

Secretary and Executive Officer.

The Board of Commissioners
of the District of Columbia.

ABC

Enclosures.

April 26, 1917.

Dear Sirs:

The Commission of Fine Arts have given careful consideration to your letter of April 13th last, asking their opinion with respect to certain questions arising in connection with the construction of the Hotel Washington in this city.

With reference to the first point you inquire about, the plans show that the additional story occupies a space well within the permissible height of a mansard roof, and for appearance sake is much to be preferred to a mansard.

As for the pergola-like structure, the Commission find that it is calculated to add to the appearance of the sky line of the building, and that the height to which the building has been carried, including pergola, is much less than the permissible height on Pennsylvania Avenue and F Street. On the whole, the Commission find that the purpose of the regulations for the protection of the Government buildings has been fully met in the plans submitted, and recommend their approval by the Commissioners of the District of Columbia.

By direction of the Commission:

Respectfully,

Colonel, U. S. Army,
Secretary and Executive Officer.

The Board of Commissioners
of the District of Columbia.